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Ethiopia

Interagency Intelligence Memorandum

Prospects for Ethiopia in the Next Year

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PROSPECTS FOR ETHIOPIA¹ IN THE NEXT YEAR

CONCLUSIONS

We conclude that the individuals who are on top in Ethiopia today may disappear, even within the year, but:

- in any case, some element of the military will continue to dominate the power structure, probably still identified as the Provisional Military Advisory Council (PMAC);
- the revolution will not be reversed to restore the old political order;
- the PMAC, in its impatience to get on with reform, is likely to continue to resort to coercion, thereby inviting opposition;
- at the same time, however, the PMAC may try to gain some degree of political legitimacy by erecting a facade of civilian institutions.

Within its own heartland, the government faces major problems, notably rural dissidence, which we believe will grow and greatly tax the government's capacity to govern outside the major administrative centers. Urban discontent will cause trouble too.

Meanwhile, there is no sign whatever of a flagging of Eritrean insurgent determination to fight on. The two liberation groups, the Eritrean Liberation Front and the Popular Liberation Forces, may

¹ This Memorandum was drafted by State/INR with contributions from CIA and DIA, and reviewed by representatives of these organizations.

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not unite any time soon, but they have generally ceased fighting one another and have engaged in limited military cooperation. Current tactics suggest that both groups are likely to pose continuing threats to US citizens and installations. Now that the guerrillas are carrying the burden of a full-scale insurgency, they are even less inclined than in the past to take guidance from their political representatives abroad. Yet only the latter show any willingness to treat independence as a negotiable issue. We believe the war will go on.

The task of the Ethiopian military is further complicated by the necessity of guarding the Ogaden region and the ethnic Somalis who live there against frontal attack or subversion by Somalia, which claims the territory. It must also keep an eye on those other border straddlers, the Afars, whose traditional leader, now in exile, is attempting to assist the limited Afar insurgency through arms shipments via the French Territory of Afars and Issas (FTAI). We do not believe Somalia will attempt to seize the Ogaden by force in 1975-76, barring a complete breakdown of order in the Ethiopian armed forces, but we anticipate intermittent Somali encouragement of Ogadeni dissidence.

If the French go ahead, as they apparently intend, to relinquish power in the FTAI to a pro-French independent government within the next two years, Ethiopian anxiety will justifiably increase. Such a move would invite Somali irredentist activity and—depending on what international guarantees are given for the territory—could bring Ethiopia and Somalia into a dangerous confrontation.

In the year ahead we think the Ethiopians will seek correct relations with the US, primarily in order to preserve access to the US arms market. However, as a rule they will not welcome US advice. A turn for the worse in our relations will occur if the Ethiopians turn to a virulent xenophobia out of frustration with mounting problems.

The USSR's commitment to Mogadiscio limits its maneuverability in dealing with the PMAC, and as long as all goes well in Soviet-Somali relations, there are not likely to be any departures in the Soviets' approach to Ethiopia. The Chinese have not entered the arms race in the Horn and will probably not take any bold initiatives in Ethiopia in the near future.

The Arab states will remain important to Ethiopia and the PMAC will seek good relations with them, despite the PMAC resentment of support from some Arab nations for the Eritreans. After all, bad relations would make the Eritrean problem worse by prompting still more Arab aid to the insurgents. It would also leave Ethiopia isolated in the region.

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DISCUSSION

1. Since September 1974 Ethiopia has been governed by the Provisional Military Administrative Council, composed of junior officers and enlisted men who are bent on a radical restructuring of society. The Council has managed to destroy the political and economic power of the former ruling classes—to the point that no successor regime could completely restore it—and is trying to establish a new egalitarian order.

2. But the forced pace of change—involving the abolition of the monarchy, the declaration of Ethiopian socialism, the nationalization of most of the modern economy, and land reform—has alienated both elites and peasants. Rebellions are going on in all of the country's 14 provinces, and some regions are completely outside central government control. Rural dissidence will continue to grow, and at some point the PMAC may control only the major administrative centers, vital agricultural areas, and transportation arteries. Efforts to put down these revolts, to combat the long-standing insurgency in Eritrea, and to guard the Ogaden borders against Somalia have badly strained military capabilities.

3. Despite widespread opposition to PMAC rule, however, no group appears at this time to have the organization and leadership to overthrow the Council. The most likely scenario is a shift of power within the PMAC itself. Growing discontent within the military—especially in the ranks—over the Council's radical policies may lead to the emergence of a more pragmatic leadership.

4. Moreover, there are indications that the PMAC, while maintaining a tight lid on political dissidence, will try to co-opt some of its opponents and gain some degree of political legitimacy through the quasi-civilianization of its rule. A committee has been established to draw up guidelines for a political party and to conduct political education programs throughout the country. But continued military control is certain—probably through a military advisory committee composed of the nucleus of the PMAC.

The PMAC's Governing Abilities

5. The Council—originally an unwieldy body of 120 members—has over the last year reduced its size to approximately 50 and improved its decision-making procedures. For a time, power seemed to be centered in an inner group of about 10 members, but in recent weeks it has appeared to be diffused more widely. Council committees with specific area responsibilities (for political, economic, social, administrative, defense, and internal security affairs) maintain liaison with the appropriate ministries. But policy may still be decided arbitrarily by the Council, without consultation with the technical experts in the administration. Moreover, fear of PMAC punitive actions makes the bureaucrats reluctant to take any initiative.

Military Cleavages

6. The major threat to the PMAC is the lack of cohesiveness within the military establishment. The

Council is led by junior officers who have come up through the ranks and who have so far been able to hold the allegiance of troops who have been steadily politicized since the initial mutinies in February 1974. The chain of command has never been completely reestablished, and indiscipline is rife. Many senior officers appear to be slated for retirement.

7. The enlisted-man majority on the PMAC has provided crucial support to the present leadership, but at the same time it has slowed decision-making and reinforced extremist tendencies within the Council. An attempt is under way to phase the enlisted men out through assignments abroad or to other government posts. Resentment on their part over the reorganization may lead them to conspire against the PMAC officers or to back a group of officers willing to curry favor with them.

8. Personal rivalries and policy disagreements continue to divide the PMAC officers. The most intensive rivalry has been between the two vice chairmen—Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam and Lt. Col. Atnafu Abate. Both are committed to revolutionary change, but differ on the methods of achieving it. Of the two, Atnafu is supposed to be more opportunistic and anti-US.



General Teferi Benti

9. According to recent reports, a group of Council members, led by General Teferi Benti, the Council's chairman, has gained influence at the expense of Mengistu and Atnafu who seem to have lost some power, though both remain members of the PMAC and retain their titles. The Teferi group reportedly regarded the Mengistu-Atnafu leadership as too radical and too disruptive of military unity. The power struggle within the Council may not be fully resolved. If Teferi is able to consolidate his power, he will probably moderate some of the Council's coercive and unpopular policies.

10. Other splits are between the PMAC and outlying units—especially the Second Division, which is taking mounting casualties in Eritrea, and the Third Division, which is discontent over living conditions in the Ogaden. The military is also unhappy over land reform that deprives them of land grants promised by the old regime in lieu of pensions. New mutinies by outlying units could set in course a chain reaction that might lead to a change in PMAC policies or a shakeup of the Council itself.

Urban Discontent

11. The PMAC and the urban elite—bureaucrats, skilled labor, students, and intelligentsia—cooperated to topple the old regime, but split over the military's determination to monopolize political power and set the pace of revolutionary change. Moreover, the PMAC's pursuit of a more equitable society through land nationalization and the proposed setting of maximum and minimum income levels has eroded the wealth and privileges of the urban elite. The Council's response to challenges from these groups has been heavyhanded repression—shootings of labor union members, jailings of teachers, and banishment of students to the countryside. Future defiance of the PMAC by the urban elite is likely to fail unless it manages to find military allies. Such an alliance could develop if disaffected PMAC members try to exploit labor and student discontent to further their own political ambitions.

Rural Rebellions

12. Large parts of the countryside are in rebellion against the PMAC, in reaction to land reform and what is perceived as a general loosening of cen-

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tral government authority. The dissidence varies from tribal warfare in remote areas, to landlord-tenant conflict in the southern Galla provinces, to a conservative landlord-peasant alliance in the northern Amhara provinces. Given the technological superiority of central government forces and the country's geographical fragmentation, rural rebellions do not at this time pose a threat to the PMAC. But rebel capabilities will increase if Ethiopian exiles with a political base in the northern provinces manage to obtain significant amounts of foreign arms and money.

13. At some juncture the PMAC will have to reach an accommodation with rural dissidents, probably through a modification of land reform. The most favorable reception to land reform has been in the south where inequalities in holdings were greatest; but implementation has not even been attempted in most of the hostile north and may be postponed indefinitely. At the same time, the PMAC is trying to create new local-center linkages through peasant associations that may become the rural cadres of the planned political party. The Council is gambling on the ability of peasants to mobilize to protect their interests. But enterprising landlords and other elites may eventually manage to share power with the peasants in running the rural areas.

The Eritrean Insurgency

14. The most serious provincial dissidence is the Eritrean insurgency, which over the past year has burgeoned into a war between more than 20,000 Ethiopian troops and approximately 10,000 insurgents, not all of whom are armed. The rebels are backed by most of the province's civilian population. The administration of martial law continues to be carried out in ruthless, repressive fashion. Frequent sweep operations, food rationing, and strict control of transportation have been successful in keeping the insurgents off balance. Still, heavy engagements occur sporadically, and both sides have incurred fairly heavy casualties. The insurgents' major *military* objective seems to be an attempt to cut the Ethiopians' long and exposed supply lines.

15. The two insurgent factions—the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Popular Libera-

tion Forces (PLF)—have stopped fighting each other and have engaged in limited military cooperation against the Ethiopians. Their political leaders abroad have agreed to form joint committees to coordinate the two groups' activities, and they are making plans to hold a general conference to discuss complete unification. Real political union, however, does not appear to be imminent. The unification effort is supported by the ELF military command, but opposed by the PLF military command led by Isaias Afewerki.

16. Isaias' opposition probably stems partly from his concern that unification will upset the delicate religious balance in the PLF. Both rebel factions are predominantly Moslem, but the PLF has more Christians, especially among its leadership. Isaias, a Christian, probably fears unification will dilute Christian influence—and weaken his own position.

17. Other issues have contributed to the widening split between the PLF military command and the Foreign Mission, led by Osman Saleh Sabbe and Wolde-Ab Wolde-Mariam. The long-standing personal enmity and rivalry for power between Osman and Isaias has intensified. Ideology plays a part: Osman—although a leftist—is more pragmatic than Isaias.

18. The PLF guerrillas, now that they are carrying the burden of fighting a full-scale insurgency, are even less inclined to accept the direction of their political representatives abroad. The fighters also resent the comfortable living conditions enjoyed by members of the Foreign Mission, and they are probably suspicious that Mission members have diverted Front funds to their personal use.

19. The field fighters of both factions are more willing than their representatives abroad to take anti-US measures—such as the kidnaping of four Americans and minings which resulted in the deaths of two others. The insurgents will pose a continuing threat to US citizens. The targeting of US citizens and installations stems from the emergence of a younger, more militant leadership that sees the US military aid program to the PMAC as a major cause of insurgent frustrations on the battlefield. Anti-US operations are a means to venting that frustration; kidnapings also provide international publicity.

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20. The current military and political impasse in Eritrea is likely to continue, barring either a breakdown of Ethiopian military unity or the emergence of a united insurgent movement bolstered by large amounts of additional Arab aid. Major Arab benefactors—Syria, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia—appear unlikely to grant aid in the amounts necessary to significantly alter the insurgents' military capabilities. Saudi Arabia might be inclined to increase its aid if the Ethiopian military continues to employ harsh tactics in Eritrea. Even then, Jidda's concern over leftist influence in the insurgent movement could inhibit a favorable decision.

21. At a future point the countrywide administrative decentralization now being considered by the PMAC may provide a basis for accommodation of Eritrean nationalism. Osman and Wolde-Ab may be more willing to compromise on the question of Eritrean independence than either the ELF or the PLF military command. Both the government and the insurgents, however, will have to show a greater willingness to compromise than is evident at present. Despite the PMAC's revolutionary and socialist rhetoric, most Eritreans regard the regime as simply a new form of Amhara hegemony.

Other Peripheral Problems

22. *The Afars.* The PMAC has so far managed to contain the insurgency of Afar tribesmen that threatens the only railroad and the major road from Addis Ababa to the sea. Nevertheless, Afar attacks on fuel convoys have caused fuel shortages in the interior. The Afars, who live in both Ethiopia and the FTAI, are in revolt over the PMAC's ouster of their traditional leader—Sultan Ali Mirah. PMAC attempts to split the Afars within Ethiopia by distributing Ali Mirah's extensive landholdings and by backing his political rivals may meet with some limited success. But the Sultan's deposal has affronted most of the FTAI Afars, including members of the Afar-dominated government, and has pushed them into an anti-Ethiopian alliance with Issa politicians.

23. If the French go ahead with their apparent decision to grant independence to the FTAI within the next two years, Ethiopia will face the possibility that the terminus of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railroad may come under the control of

a hostile or pro-Somali independent state. In such a case, armed conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia over the territory would be difficult to avoid.

24. *The Ogaden.* Barring a complete breakdown in order in the Ethiopian armed forces, Somali President Siad probably will not try to seize the Ogaden by force during the next year or so. Siad may not be confident that his armed forces are capable of taking and holding any significant amount of Ethiopian territory at this time, and an attack that failed could cost him his position as head of the Supreme Revolutionary Council. Over the longer term, however, Somali military capabilities will gradually improve as a result of Soviet assistance, while those of Ethiopia will continue to be degraded as a result of the Eritrean insurgency. Siad probably believes that time is on Somalia's side. There is a tantalizing possibility that Ethiopia will fracture solely due to internal forces, while a premature external attack would likely provide a rallying point which could reverse the current decline of central government control. A conflict at this time would probably stimulate more external support to Ethiopia and could jeopardize much-needed outside assistance to Somalia.

25. For now, the PMAC's growing tendency to dispatch Third Division units to other troubled regions may invite Somali military probes across the border for limited, mainly political objectives, and a renewal of Somali support of an insurgency in the Ogaden is likely if security conditions in Ethiopia continue to deteriorate. There is a danger of Somali overconfidence and miscalculation which could precipitate a military confrontation with Ethiopia. But we judge that Siad will probably not order a military campaign to acquire the Ogaden by force unless it is clear that the Ethiopian Government has lost its ability to control its armed forces.

Potential Economic Problems

26. Over the next year or two, growing economic problems may affect the PMAC's ability to govern. The Council inherited a relatively sound economy from the old regime—a good credit standing at home and abroad and foreign exchange reserves equal to a year's imports. These assets have enabled

the PMAC to undertake a major deficit financing program to fund increased defense expenditures and ambitious development projects.

27. But the Council's economic policies have introduced uncertainties about the future:

- Does Ethiopia have enough skilled manpower to enable the state to play the major economic role it has assumed?
- What are the alternatives to foreign private investment which is drying up?
- Will the regime be able to weather potential food shortages in the politically volatile urban areas (where many military families live) stemming from the disruptions of land reform?

28. Still, the PMAC has demonstrated some economic flexibility (by not enforcing unworkable decrees and by postponing further nationalizations), and it has had good luck (exceptionally good rains that will increase the next harvest and a rise in the price of its major export—coffee—resulting from the Brazilian frost). In general, Ethiopia's economic problems are probably manageable over the short term and certainly do not match the far greater political and military tensions.

Foreign Relations

29. *The US.* The close relationship that the US enjoyed with Ethiopia under the Emperor has fundamentally changed. The PMAC's initial intense suspicion of the US has diminished, but the relationship continues to be marked by considerable ambivalence. The military regime—which is fighting for its survival and the country's territorial integrity—is unlikely to jeopardize its major source of arms. The Council is probably convinced at this point that it can count on the US to continue a military grant and sales program, even without Kagnev as the *quid pro quo*. Therefore, the PMAC would prefer that the US withdraw completely from the facility, which damages the non-aligned image the Council wants to project and exposes the Ethiopian military's inability to protect US citizens from insurgent attacks. However, the Council will probably not press too hard for withdrawal unless it becomes apparent that the US could no longer be counted on as a primary arms supplier.

30. The military relationship bears only slightly on Ethiopian willingness to take account of US advice and interests in other areas. It is doubtful that the PMAC will be responsive to US demarches for a less repressive policy in Eritrea, for speedy compensation for US nationalized firms, or for UN votes supporting US positions—unless the Council perceives such moves as strengthening its own domestic and international position.

31. The PMAC's mounting problems may arouse latent Ethiopian xenophobia and a search for foreign scapegoats. Arab aid to Eritrean insurgents has already kindled anti-Arab sentiment within Ethiopia, and some Council members reportedly suspect the US, the USSR, and other foreign countries of involvement in recent terrorist incidents in Addis Ababa. If the regime's survival appears to be seriously endangered, it could lash out at foreign countries including the US.

32. *The USSR.* The PMAC is probably disappointed by the lack of Soviet response to its feelers for military aid. The Soviets welcome the erosion of US influence in Ethiopia and may cultivate pro-Soviet Ethiopian groups with an eye to a possibly greater role in the future. But the overriding Soviet concern is to avoid hostilities in the Horn that could lead to a polarization of forces and jeopardize access to its military facilities in Somalia. Therefore, Moscow seems resigned to continue US military aid to the PMAC, since the aid maintains a rough parity between Ethiopian and Somali armed forces and thus helps to dissuade the Mogadiscio government from an attack on the Ogaden. Moreover, Soviet influence and pressure have been exerted in varying degrees on Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), Somalia, and Iraq to reduce their support of the Eritrean insurgents. These efforts presumably reflect Soviet concern that a breaking up of the Ethiopian state would almost certainly be followed by armed conflict. For the foreseeable future, the USSR will probably continue to assign greater value to its convenient and relatively inexpensive Somali facilities than to a closer relationship with an unstable Ethiopian regime.

33. *The PRC.* Nor have the Chinese shown much more inclination to give aid to the PMAC, apart from continuing the economic aid programs ne-

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gotiated by the Haile Selassie government. In addition to PRC wariness about the PMAC's ability to survive and what Peking regards as ill-conceived domestic policies, the Chinese see little benefit in becoming involved in a regional arms race with the Soviets that they cannot win. Thus, they regard a continued US presence in Ethiopia, especially the military aid program, as a counterbalance to Soviet influence in the general area. However, if the PMAC is able to restore some degree of domestic tranquility, the Chinese may be more willing to increase economic aid.

34. *Israel and Arab Countries.* Despite the pro-Israeli sympathies of some PMAC members (who were trained in the Israeli-staffed Holeta training center) and their appreciation of past Israeli military training, the Ethiopian military sees its larger interests served by a rapprochement with the Arabs. At the same time, the Ethiopians will be likely to retain discreet contacts with the Israelis based upon past associations.

35. The PMAC values good relations with regional Arab states that are disposed to help Ethiopia

resolve the Eritrean insurgency—especially Egypt, the Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and the Yemen Arab Republic. These states seek to prevent an increase in the Red Sea area of the influence of radical Arab states (especially the insurgents' longtime supporters—Syria and Iraq) and a restoration of Ethiopian-Israeli ties.

36. Moreover, Ethiopian diplomacy has blunted—at least temporarily—the renewed Arab interest in the insurgent cause that followed the heavy fighting of February-March 1975. The PMAC made a veiled threat to support southern Sudanese dissidents in retaliation for possible Sudanese aid for the Eritreans, appealed to the PDRY as a fellow revolutionary state, and warned the Arab countries generally of the damage that the Eritrean issue could do to Arab-African relations. But the danger remains that growing Ethiopian repressiveness toward the province could dissipate the good will of neighboring states and accelerate the flow of Arab aid to the insurgents. Substantial Saudi military aid, in particular, could alter the present military balance.